

***Mr. Sunshine* as a Tool  
for Teaching Korean History and Culture**

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  - History, class system, tradition & gender roles, conflicts of identity, language & communication, poetic aspects, character development, and conflicts of identity
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# Introduction

- The rise and popularity of K-dramas in the last two decades. First in Asia and, later, over the world.
- Teaching traditional Korean history and culture through *Mr. Sunshine* in HUMN 4471, an online writing-intensive class.
- Rationale for the selection:
  - A wealth of historical, cultural, & aesthetical values
  - Easy access (on Netflix)
  - Popularity of the Korean language and culture
- Initial pedagogical steps:
  - Provided an introduction with historical and cultural context.
  - Study guides given before viewing the episodes.

# Teaching Korean History

- Historical context:
  - Studio Dragon/Netflix: “a work of fiction based on historical facts”
  - Mr. Sunshine refers to and/or covers five decades of Korean history (about 1870-1920), around the fall of the Joseon Dynasty and the invasion and occupation by Japan:
    - Foreign interventions and Shinmiyangyo in 1871 in Gangwha Island, a “disturbance/expedition” by the US that resulted in battles.
    - Assassination of Joseon’s Queen Min in 1895 by Japan.
    - Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905. After the victory, Japan intensified its imperialistic aggressions in East Asia.
    - Eulsa Neukyahk in 1905, a forced treaty between Joseon and Japan that deprived Joseon of its diplomatic sovereignty.

# The Class System in the Joseon Dynasty

- The characters occupy different places in the spectrum of the class system in Joseon.
  - King Gojong
  - Nobles, including ministers: Ae-shin, the heroine & protagonist
  - Jungin, or the middle class: interpreters. Traitor Lee Wan-ik later becomes Minister of Foreign Affairs
  - Commoners and farm tenants
  - Nobi and butchers: Eugene (Yu-jin), the male protagonist and Dong-mae
  - The members of the Righteous Army from all of the classes

## Tradition and Gender Roles

- Ae-shin, the protagonist, defies what is expected of the noble women in Joseon:
  - Her desire and effort to learn
  - Her refusal to live like a flower protected by a husband
  - Her resolution to fight against Japan for Korea's independence and to live like a "bulkkot":
    - A flower (*kkot*) vs. a fire flower (*bulkkot*)
    - A flame in Korean is 'a fire flower'
- Joseon women who fought against Japan for Korea's independence

## Conflicts of Identity

- Eugene Choi (Choi Yu-jin), the male protagonist:
  - Joseon/Korean-American. His Korean appearance vs. American status. Where does he truly belong? What do others think of him?
- Dong-mae (Ishida Sho): Joseon/Korean-Japanese.
- Lee Wan-ik: Joseon/Korean-Japanese. A traitor.
- Other characters motivated by their personal interests and greed.

# Language, Communication, & Power

- The role of language in cultural interactions, assimilation, and conflicts
  - The love between Ae-shin and Eugene is accompanied by the process of learning each other's language.
  - Status and language
  - A foreshadowing of the linguistic oppression and ethnocide committed by Japan
- Linguistic diversity and confusion
  - Languages spoken: Korean, English, Japanese, French, etc.
  - Language and espionage



# Metaphors & Cultivating Poetic Sensitivity

- Students were asked to observe and analyze the use of metaphors.
  - An example in connecting scenes from Episodes 5 & 10: (Hotaru) --Wishing for clouds and a rainbow in a drought. (Dong-mae) --Hoping for clouds and a rainbow? What rainbow? Even silk cuts skin.
  - To consider the impossibility of the love the butcher's son-turned-samurai has for Lady Ae-shin. What do "rainbow," "drought," "silk," & "skin" metaphorize or symbolize?

(00:39-01:57)

EP5-14 ※레전드 엔딩※ 감히 애기씨의 치맛자락을 잡아 보는 천민 구동매의 눈빛 |  
#미스터션샤인 - YouTube



# Character Development

- Kim Hui-seong: goes through the biggest transformation. From being a seemingly immature fiancé of Ae-shin to a resolute, conscientious reporter and recorder of Joseon's demise and Japan's atrocities.
- Eugene Choi (Choi Yu-jin): a slave-turned-US marine holding a grudge against Joseon('s nobility) becomes Ae-shin's love and protector.
- Gu Dong-mae (Ishida Sho): The butcher's son turns into a samurai to execute his revenge but ends up being Ae-shin's protector.
- Ae-shin is the link that connects the three men.

# Assessment

- Two short essay tests, each after viewing and studying 12 episodes. A study guide provided to prompt students to focus on important, relevant aspects of each scene.
- Students were asked to write a paragraph commenting on each of the selected scenes, usually dialogs, including and analyzing important details. They were also asked to identify the speakers.
- Students were evaluated on content and writing skills.
- Assessed students' ability to focus on and coherently analyze important aspects of a scene, taking into account broader yet relevant context.

# Final Observations

- Students enjoyed watching *Mr. Sunshine* and learning about Korean culture through the K-drama.
- Several students wrote a research paper on the K-drama.
- The difficulty of synthesizing relevant content and analyzing important aspects of a scene in a paragraph. The next time:
  - To provide a sample paragraph for a few dialogs.
  - To provide more guidance on observing, appreciating, and analyzing metaphors & symbols.

The End

감사합니다!

Thank you!

Grazie!